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by Leslie-Anne Keown

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...	not applicable
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0[s]	value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
p	preliminary
r	revised
x	suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
E	use with caution
F	too unreliable to be published

Precautions taken to avoid victimization: A gender perspective

by Leslie-Anne Keown

Introduction

While the vast majority of Canadians are satisfied with their personal safety from crime (94%),[1] many take precautions to protect themselves from becoming a victim of crime and some experience fear of crime. Past research has shown that fear of crime and use of precautions are not equal between men and women nor used equally among all age groups.[2,3,4] Additionally, it is likely that perceptions and fear of crime, as well as the use of precautions to avoid becoming a victim of crime differ between those living in urban and rural areas[5,6] and even between those living in urban areas of different sizes.[7,8]

Using the 2004 General Social Survey (GSS) on criminal victimization, this study examines differences in perceptions of crime, fear of crime and use of precautionary behaviours to avoid victimization for the prime working-age population (25 to 54 years) living in Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) in Canada (For concepts and definitions see "What you should know about this study").[9] Perceptions considered include perceptions of neighbourhood crime and measures of fear of crime. Precautions taken to avoid victimization include behaviours that limit some forms of day-to-day activity. These include staying home at night to avoid being a victim of crime (avoidance) and habitual behaviours which are engaged in to reduce exposure to crime and thus limit the possibility of victimization, for example, locking car doors (routine precautions).

The GSS also asks respondents about their use of lifetime protective measures such as installing new locks or burglar alarms and getting a dog for protection. Previous research has noted that there are differences

What you should know about this study

This article is based on data collected by the 2004 General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS is an annual survey that monitors changes and emerging trends in Canadian society. The information was collected in 2004 through Cycle 18 of the General Social Survey (GSS) on victimization. This cycle collected information on Canadians' experience of victimization and public attitudes towards crime, police, courts, prison and parole. The target population of the 2004 GSS included all people aged 15 and over, except full-time residents of the Yukon, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. Data were collected each month from January to December 2004. Over this period, approximately 24,000 individuals were successfully interviewed.

CMA: Census Metropolitan Area. A CMA is an area consisting of one or more adjacent municipalities situated around a major urban core. A CMA must have a population of at least 100,000 and the urban core must have a population of at least 50,000. The CMAs represented here are based on geography of the 2001 Census. The CMAs included were St. John's, Halifax, Saint John, Chicoutimi-Jonquière, Québec, Sherbrooke, Trois-Rivières, Montréal, Ottawa-Hull, Kingston, Oshawa, Toronto, Hamilton, St. Catharines-Niagara, Kitchener, London, Windsor, Greater Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon, Calgary, Edmonton, Abbotsford, Vancouver and Victoria.

This article examines only respondents who resided in CMAs and were of the core working age (25 to 54). This resulted in a sample of 8,095 respondents representing approximately 9.6 million Canadians.

between men and women in the use of lifetime protective measures, but these are less pronounced than the gender differences seen in precautions that limit some forms of day-to-day activity.[10] This is likely because lifetime measures are more focused on activities related to household experiences than on an individual's action.

More specifically, this article focuses on determining whether there are differences in the perceptions of fear of crime and the use of precaution measures between men and women in the study population, and examines whether any differences persist once other factors (including fear of crime and perceptions of the presence of crime) that may influence the use of precautions have been taken into account.

The study population

The study population in this group consists of the core working-age population (those between the ages of 25 and 54)[11] living in CMAs. This results in a sample of 8,095 people representing approximately 4.8 million women and 4.8 million men living in Canada.

The age group for this study was chosen because it represents a significant portion of the population and this age group may exhibit different fear of crime and perceptions than young adults or older individuals. For example, the core working-age population (25 to 54) was less likely to have experienced victimization in the last 12 months than their younger counterparts (31% versus 43%). However, they were more likely to have self-reported victimization than their older counterparts (31% versus 14%). The working-age population was also less likely than older Canadians to have used a precaution to protect themselves from victimization (data not shown).

Different patterns are also seen when those residing in CMAs are compared to those living elsewhere (See "CMA versus non-CMA" for details). For these reasons, this article focuses on the core working-age population of Canadians living in CMAs.

CMA versus non-CMA

How do those residing in CMAs differ in perception of crime, fear of crime and use of precautions to avoid victimization from those living outside CMAs?

There are considerable differences between individuals of the core working age (25 to 54 years) residing in CMAs and those residing outside CMAs with respect to perceptions of neighbourhood crime, fear of crime, and use of precautionary behaviours that limit day-to-day activity.

In 2004, those residing in CMAs were more likely to have experienced victimization (33%) than those residing outside CMAs (27%). They were also more likely to report that crime is higher in their neighbourhood compared to other neighbourhoods and to believe that crime in their neighbourhood had increased in the last five years.

Those residing in CMAs were also more likely to report fear of crime. For example, 15% of those residing in CMAs reported feeling unsafe walking alone at night in their neighbourhood compared to 9% among those living outside CMAs. Those residing in CMAs also reported higher levels of worry when they were home alone (22%) than those residing outside CMAs (16%).

With regard to the use of precautionary behaviours, those living in CMAs were more likely to use more precautionary behaviours. About 10% of those residing in CMAs stated they used an avoidance precaution (staying home) and 77% reported using at least one routine precaution. For those residing outside CMAs, 6% reported using an avoidance precaution and 66% reported using at least one routine precaution.

Do men and women differ in their perception of the amount of crime around them?

Before examining the specific precautions taken to avoid becoming a victim of crime, it is necessary to first examine whether men and women differ in the amount of crime they perceive around them. For example, if their perception of crime differs, then it might be expected that men and women would react differently to crime, with the group perceiving more crime reacting more strongly (either with regard to fear or precautionary behaviours).[12,13,14,15] However, there is only a slight difference in how the sexes perceive the amount of crime around them (Table 1).

In 2004, 35% of women and 32% of men perceived that crime in their neighbourhood had increased in the last five years. This three percentage point difference is statistically significant but relatively small. Men and women did not differ about whether they believed that crime in their neighbourhood was higher when compared to other neighbourhoods, with just over 1 in 10 saying that crime in their neighbourhood was higher than in other neighbourhoods.

Do men and women differ in their fear of perceived crime?

Although men and women did not differ substantially in how much crime they perceived; there were significant differences between men and women

Table 1 Perceptions of crime among 25 to 54 year olds living in a CMA, by gender, 2004

	Total	Women	Men	Odds of women compared to men
		percentage		odds ratio
Neighbourhood crime is higher compared to other neighbourhoods in Canada	11	11	12	0.92
Crime in your neighbourhood has increased in the last 5 years	33	35	32	1.16*

* statistically significant difference between men and women at $p < 0.05$

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2004.

Table 2 Perceptions of personal safety among 25 to 54 year olds living in a CMA, by gender, 2004

	Total	Women	Men	Odds of women compared to men
		percentage		odds ratio
Feel somewhat or very unsafe walking alone after dark	15	24	7*	4.23*
Somewhat or very worried when home alone in the evening	22	30	15*	2.49*

* statistically significant difference between men and women at $p < 0.05$

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2004.

with respect to their fear of crime (Table 2). It is evident from the data that women were more fearful than men. In 2004, 24% of women of core working age living in CMAs said they felt somewhat unsafe or very unsafe walking alone after dark. In contrast, only 7% of men felt this way. Stated another way, the odds of a woman feeling unsafe walking alone after dark were 4.2 times higher than those of a man.

Another measure of fear is whether a person feels worried when home alone. Again, differences between the sexes are marked: twice as many women (30%) as men (15%) were somewhat or very worried when home alone in the evening.

Do men and women differ in their avoidance behaviours?

While women and men had similar feelings about their sense of neighbourhood crime, fear responses varied significantly between the sexes. This same pattern of large differences between men and women is also seen when their use of precautions taken to avoid victimization, which can limit day-to-day activity, is examined. One type of precautionary practice is avoidance behaviour. Avoidance behaviour reflects the restrictions individuals place on their own movements in order to protect themselves from crime.[16,17,18,19] This restriction of activity has important societal consequences because it limits personal freedom and also because it can change urban interactions and patterns of mobility in, for example, public places like shopping areas and community gathering places.[20]

The GSS measures avoidance behaviours by asking whether individuals stay home at night because they are afraid to go out alone. While only 3% of men in the study population avoided going out alone at night, 17% of women engaged in this behaviour as a means to avoid becoming a victim of crime (Chart 1). In other words, the odds of a woman between the ages of 25 and 54 practicing avoidance behaviour to protect herself from crime were 7.0 times higher than that of a man in the same age group.

Therefore, while it appears that men and women largely agree on the amount of crime they perceive in their neighbourhoods, there are large differences between the sexes in their fear of crime. Not surprisingly then, there are important differences for men and women in their avoidance behaviour.

Do men and women differ in the routine precautions taken to avoid being a victim of crime?

In addition to avoidance behaviours, precautions that limit day-to-day activity can involve behaviours adopted habitually to protect oneself from becoming a victim, usually when away from home.[21] These are called routine precautions. Similar to avoidance behaviours, the use of routine precautions can have an impact on personal freedom but, perhaps more importantly, they serve to protect the individual.

The GSS asked respondents if they used four routine precautions. As was the case with avoidance as a precautionary behaviour, women were much more likely than men to use routine precautions. Indeed, the odds of a woman using a routine precaution were 5.7 times higher than the odds of a man. In other words, among those aged 25 to 54 living in CMAs, 91% of women used at least one routine precaution compared to 64% of men (Table 3).

Gender differences were also found in each of the four separate behaviours. The least common precautionary behaviour for both men and women was carrying something for self-defence, with 21% of women and 8% of men reporting that they routinely engaged in this activity. And

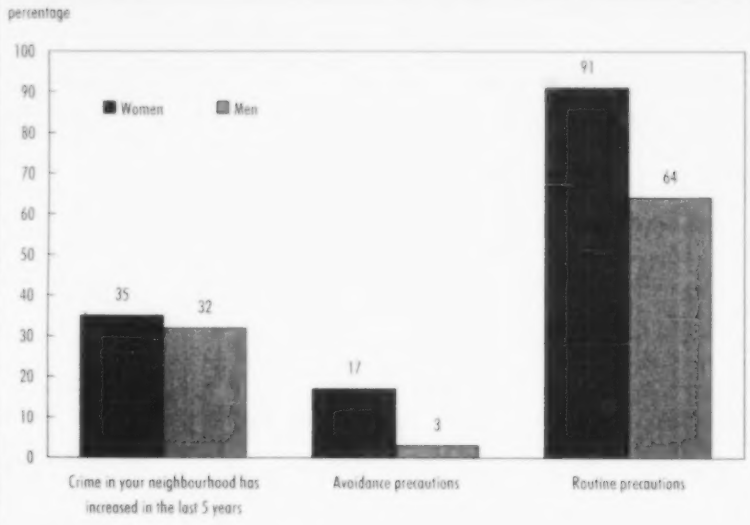
Table 3 Routine precautions taken to avoid victimization among 25 to 54 year olds living in a CMA, by gender, 2004

	Total	Women	Men	Odds of women compared to men
	percentage			odds ratio
Used any of the routine precautions below	**77**	**91**	**64***	**5.73***
Carried something to defend yourself or alert other people	14	21	8*	3.05*
Locked the car doors for personal safety when alone in the car	62	80	44*	4.98*
Checked the back seat for intruders when alone and returning to your car	47	64	31*	4.03*
Planned your route with safety in mind	47	60	34*	2.98*

* statistically significant difference between men and women at $p < 0.05$

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2004

Chart 1 Women and men perceive similar amounts of crime but their use of precautions differs



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2004

while about 60% of women planned their route with safety in mind, this was the case for 34% of men. Women were also much more likely than men to use car-related precautionary behaviours. For example, women were 4 to 5 times more likely than men to lock their car doors and to check the back seat of their vehicle when alone.

The 2004 General Social Survey data indicate that there are important differences between men and women with respect to the avoidance and routine precautionary behaviours they used to protect themselves from victimization and to help with fear of crime, while there are no substantive differences in neighbourhood crime perceptions (Chart 1). However, it is possible that part of the gender difference in precautionary behaviours could be explained by other influences such as age, income, education, fear, and crime perceptions. The following section examines these intervening factors.

Do gender differences in precautionary behaviours remain once other factors are taken into account?

In order to understand whether gender differences remain important once other characteristics and factors have been accounted for, logistic regression was used. In logistic regression models, it is possible to see what unique contribution each factor makes toward understanding precautionary behaviours while controlling or removing the influence of other variables. Avoidance behaviours and routine precaution behaviours are examined in separate models.[22,23]

Past research has found that a number of other influences may explain differences in precautionary or avoidance behaviours between women and men.[24,25,26] These influences include demographic characteristics such as age, education and income, as well as neighbourhood perceptions of crime, perceptions of fear, and victimization experiences (See "Does victimization influence precaution use?" for details).

The model developed here shows that while many of these other influences were important (for example, perceptions of crime and fear, visible minority status, and whether people owned their dwellings), they did not reduce the influence of gender (Table 4). Examining avoidance behaviours by controlling for sex alone shows that the odds of a woman in the study population engaging in avoidance behaviour (staying home at night) were 7.0 times higher than the odds of a man. Even when other influences are added to the model, the odds ratio remains significantly

Does victimization influence precaution use?

Past research has shown that precaution use and criminal victimization may be linked.[1] This leads to the question of whether there are differences between men and women with respect to the relationship between precaution use and victimization.[2] Men and women aged 25 to 54 residing in CMAs did not differ in self-reported victimization. The 2004 GSS found that one in three individuals had reported some form of victimization (including victimization by a spouse or ex-spouse) in the last 12 months. Further details on victimization can be found in the *Juristat* entitled "Criminal victimization in Canada, 2004" by Gannon and Mihorean (2005), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-XPE, Vol. 25, no. 7.

The overall model results indicate that there is a relationship between self-reported victimization and routine precaution use. Those who reported victimization were 1.3 times more likely to report using a routine precaution than those who reported no victimization in the last 12 months. There was no relationship between using an avoidance precaution (staying at home) and victimization once other factors were controlled for. However, there was no indication that the influence of self-reported victimization on precaution use was different for men and women (See Table A.1 for model results).

1. Gannon, M. and Taylor-Butts, A. (2006). *Canadians' Use of Crime Prevention Measures*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85F0033MIE – No. 12.

   AuCoin, K. and Beauchamp, D. (2007). Impacts and consequences of victimization, GSS 2004. *Juristat*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-XIE, Vol. 27, no. 1.

2. Respondents reported what precaution and avoidance behaviours they used but did not indicate whether these measures were implemented before or after their victimization.

Table 4 Comparison of odds ratios for gender and precaution use

	Odds of women compared to men	
	odds ratio unadjusted	odds ratio adjusted
Avoidance behaviour	7.0	6.8
Routine precautions	5.7	5.5

* statistically significant difference between unadjusted and adjusted odds ratio at $p < 0.05$

Note: Full model results are presented in Table A.1.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2004.

higher for women than for men. Even after controlling for other confounding influences, women aged 25 to 54 living in CMAs were 6.8 times more likely to engage in avoidance behaviours than their male counterparts.

A similar picture is seen when routine precautions are considered. The odds of a woman using a routine precaution were 5.7 times higher than the odds of a man when no other influences were taken into account. When the model was used to control for other influences, women continued to have significantly higher odds of engaging in routine precautionary measures compared to men, and the influence of gender was not significantly changed by controlling for other factors in the model.

These results illustrate that even after other influences have been controlled for, gender remains an important element in explaining the differences in precautionary behaviours that limit forms of day-to-day activity. Research suggests the gender difference in precautionary behaviours persists because women feel more vulnerable than men when they are away from their place of residence.[27,28,29,30,31,32,33]

Summary

This article has shown that men and women between the ages of 25 and 54 and living in CMAs differ in their use of precautionary behaviours to protect themselves from victimization. These precautionary behaviours often limit some form of their day-to-day activities. While women and men generally perceive the same amount of crime around them, their use of precautionary behaviours is very different. Women were much more likely than men to be fearful of crime and engage in precautionary behaviours including avoidance behaviours and taking routine precautions. This gender gap was persistent and remained substantially unchanged even when a variety of other characteristics including fear of crime were taken into account.

Leslie-Anne Keown is a social science researcher with *Canadian Social Trends*.

1. Gannon, M. (2005). *General Social Survey on Victimization, Cycle 18: An Overview of the Findings*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-565-XIE.

2. Ibid.

3. Gannon, M. and Taylor-Butts, A. (2006). *Canadians' Use of Crime Prevention Measures*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85F0033MIE – No. 12.

4. Keown, L.A. (2007a). *Personal Crime Precautions in Canada (1993-2004): An Exploration*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. University of Calgary. Calgary, Alberta.

5. Gannon, M. (2005).

6. Gannon, M. and Taylor-Butts, A. (2006).

7. Keown, L.A. (2007b). *Incorporating Place into Research: An Example Using Personal Crime Precautions in Canada*. Statistics Canada Socio-Economic Conference. Ottawa, ON. May 28.

8. Keown, L.A. (2007a).

9. The sample includes only those with non-missing information on all of the included variables in the multivariate analysis. This is to allow for comparison between the unadjusted and adjusted odds ratios.

10. Gannon, M. and Taylor-Butts, A. (2006).

11. The Labour Force Survey defines the core working age as 25 to 54 years.

12. Holloway, W. and Jefferson, T. (1997). The risk society in an age of anxiety: Situating fear of crime. *British Journal of Sociology*. 48(2): 255-266.

13. Keown, L.A. (2001). *Perceived Risk of Victimization: A Canadian Perspective*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. University of Calgary. Calgary, Alberta.

14. Ferraro, K.F. (1995). *Fear of Crime: Interpreting Victimization Risk*. Albany, NY. State University of New York Press.

15. Garland, D. (2001). *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Disorder in Contemporary Society*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.

16. Keown, L.A. (2007a).

17. Gannon, M. and Taylor-Butts, A. (2006).

18. Ferraro, K.F. (1995).

19. Miethe, T.D. (1995). Fear and withdrawal from urban life. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 539 (May): 14-27.

20. Ibid.

21. Gannon, M. and Taylor-Butts, A. (2006).

22. All models were checked using seemingly unrelated estimation to see if there were interactions between gender and the other variables in the model. An omnibus test indicated that the models for men and women were not different.

23. Models run on each of the four routine precautions produced similar results to the omnibus model presented here. Therefore, the omnibus model is presented. Further information on the individual models can be obtained from the author.

24. Gannon, M. and Taylor-Butts, A. (2006).

25. Skogan W. and Maxfield, M. (1981). *Coping with Crime: Individual and Neighbourhood Reactions*. Beverly Hills, CA. Sage Publications.

26. Gilchrist, E., Bannister, J. and Ditton, J. (1998). Women and the fear of crime: Challenging the accepted stereotype. *The British Journal of Criminology*. 38(2): 283-298.

27. Sutton, R.M. and Farall, S. (2005). Gender, socially desirable responding and fear of crime. *British Journal of Criminology*. 45: 212-224.

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29. Ferraro, K.F. (1995).

30. Gilchrist, E., Bannister, J. and Ditton, J. (1998).

31. Gordon, M.T., LeBailly, R.K. and Riger S. (1982). Coping with urban crime: Women's use of precautionary behaviours. *American Journal of Community Psychology*. 10: 369.

32. Killias, M. and Cleric, C. (2000). Different measures of vulnerability in their relation to different dimensions of fear of crime. *The British Journal of Criminology*. 40(3): 437-450.

33. Sacco, V.F. (1990). Gender, fear, and victimization: A preliminary application of power-control theory. *Sociological Spectrum*. 10(4): 485-506.

Table A.1 Logistic regression models for avoidance and routine precautions presenting odds ratios for 25 to 54 year olds living in a CMA[1]

	Avoidance precaution	Routine precaution
	odds ratio	
Sex		
Male †	1.0	1.0
Female	6.8*	5.5*
Perceptions of crime		
Crime in your neighbourhood has increased in the last 5 years		
No †	1.0	1.0
Yes	1.6*	1.4*
Neighbourhood crime is higher compared to other areas		
No †	1.0	1.0
Yes	1.7*	1.5*
Perceptions of fear and safety		
Worried when home alone		
No †	1.0	1.0
Yes	3.4*	2.7*
Victimization		
Self-reported vicitimization in the last 12 months (including spouse/ex-spouse events)		
No †	1.0	1.0
Yes	1.1	1.3*
Demographics		
Age (years)	1.01*	1.0
Postsecondary education		
No †	1.0	1.0
Yes	0.7*	1.0
Presence of child under 19 in the household		
No †	1.0	1.0
Yes	1.0	0.8*
Married/common-law		
No †	1.0	1.0
Yes	1.4*	1.1
Member of a visible minority		
No †	1.0	1.0
Yes	2.3*	1.3*
Household income		
$0 to $29,999	3.2*	1.1
$30,000 to $49,999	3.3*	1.2
$50,000 to $79,999	3.3*	1.3
$80,000 to $99,999	2.2*	1.4
$100,000 and over †	1.0	1.0
Income not stated	3.0*	1.1
Housing characteristics		
Own residence		
No †	1.0	1.0
Yes	0.7*	1.3*
Length of residence in the neighbourhood		
Less than 1 year	0.9	1.0
1 year to less than 5 years	1.0	1.3
5 to 10 years	1.0	1.0
More than 10 years †	1.0	1.0

† reference group

* statistically significant difference at $p < 0.05$

1. Census Metropolitan Area.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2004.